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S E C R E T BEIRUT 0510 COMBINED SECTION

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E.O. 12065: RUS: 4 1/22/02 (BARRETT, ROBERT S.) OR-M

TAGS: DREP (PERCY, CHARLES, H.) LE

SUBJECT: SENATOR PERCY' VISIT TO LEBANON: CONVERSATION WITH
PRIME MINISTER

1. (S-ENTIRE TEXT)

2. SUMMARY: DURING A FORTY MINUTE CONVERSATION WITH SENATOR PERCY, THE PRIME MINISTER OF LEBANON EXPRESSED THE FOLLOWING VIEWS. THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM IS BY FAR THE MOST SERIOUS ONE FOR LEBANON AND AGGRAVATES ALL OTHER PROBLEMS. IT HAS ALSO PERMITTED THE ENTRY OF THE USSR ONTO THE MIDDLE EAST SCENE. THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT'S SUGGESTED PLAN FOR AN ORDERLY DEPARTURE OF THE SYRIAN ARAB DETERRENT FORCES FROM LEBANON IS UNFORTUNATELY STYMIED BY POLITICAL MANEUVERINGS AND LEBANON MUST CONTINUE TO WORK TOWARD THE REMOVAL OF THE PRETEXTS WHICH SYRIAN USES TO JUSTIFY THE CONTINUED PRESENCE OF ITS FORCES IN THE COUNTRY. USG CONTACT WITH THE PLO WOULD BE A GOOD THING AND WOULD SHORTEN THE ROAD TO PEACE IN THE REGION. THERE IS A GREAT DESIRE AT PRESENT AMONG THE LEBANESE FOR NATIONAL RECONCILIATION BUT THE LEBANESE PROBLEM IS LINKED TO

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REGIONAL PROBLEMS WHICH MUST BE ADDRESSED EFFECTIVELY AT AN EARLY DATE FOR TIME IS RUNNING OUT. END SUMMARY.

3. SENATOR PERCY, ACCOMPANIED BY AMBASSADOR DILLON, DCM BARRETT, AND SFRS STAFFER BANNERMAN, CALLED ON LEBANESE PRIME MINISTER (PM) SHAFIQ AL-WAZZAN ON JANUARY 20 AND HAD A CONVERSATION LASTING FORTY MINUTES.

4. SENATOR PERCY OPENED THE CONVERSATION BY SAYING THAT MUCH HAD HAPPENED SINCE HIS LAST VISIT TO LEBANON IN 1975. HE COMMENDED THE PM FOR HIS COURAGE AND COOPERATION WITH PRESIDENT SARKIS, WHICH HE SAID ARE MUCH APPRECIATED BY THE USG.

5. THE PM WELCOMED THE SENATOR TO LEBANON. HE SAID THAT HE WAS ALWAYS HAPPY TO SEE PROMINENT OFFICIALS VISIT THE AREAS SO THEY COULD SEE THE SITUATION FIRST HAND AND GET CORRECT INFORMATION WHICH MIGHT RESULT IN NEW IDEAS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO SOME OF THE REGION'S PROBLEMS. THE ARRIVAL OF SENATOR PERCY WAS THEREFORE A REASON FOR OPTIMISM. AL-WAZZAN CONCLUDED HIS OPENING REMARKS BY SAYING THAT THERE WAS NO NEED FOR HIM TO REPEAT WHAT HE HAD SAID TO OTHER AMERICANS RECENTLY, AS HIS VIEWS ARE WELL-KNOWN AND RESUMABLY CONTAINED IN THE EMBASSY'S REPORTS AND HE DID NOT WANT TO SOUND LIKE A PHONOGRAPH RECORD.

6. SENATOR PERCY SAID THAT HE APPRECIATED THE PM'S RETICENCE BUT THAT IT WOULD STILL BE USEFUL FOR HIM TO HEAR IN THE PM'S OWN WORDS WHAT HIS BIGGEST CONCERNS ARE, WHAT KEEPS HIM AWAKE AT NIGHT, AND WHAT HE THOUGHT THE USG COULD DO TO HELP LEBANON ON THESE ISSUES.

7. THE PM REPLIED THAT THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM WAS THE PRIMORDIAL PROBLEM FOR LEBANON. IT WAS 30 YEARS OLD AND LIKE A SICKNESS WAS SPREADING THROUGH THE REGION. IF IT HAD BEEN PROPERLY DEALT WITH IN 1948, THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM HAD ALSO OPENED THE DOOR FOR THE ENTRY OF THE SOVIET UNION INTO THE MIDDLE EAST. LEBANON HAS ITS PROBLEMS JUST LIKE ANY OTHER COUNTRY, BUT THEY ARE SERIOUSLY AGGRAVATED BY THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE. IF THE USG COULD HELP RESOLVE THIS PROBLEM, THERE WOULD BE A RELAXATION OF TENSIONS THROUGHOUT THE REGION, A RETURN TO NORMALCY, AND A RESURGENCE OF FRIENDSHIP WITH THE WEST, FIRST OF ALL WITH THE U.S., THE GREAT DEFENDER OF

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LIBERTY AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD.

8. OTHERS OF HIS CONCERNS, CONTINUED THE PM, WERE THE UNITY AND INTEGRITY OF LEBANON. THESE WERE THREATENED BY THE WISHES OF SOME PARTIES TO IMPLANT THE PALESTINIANS IN LEBANON AND OF OTHERS TO DIVIDE LEBANON OR AMPUTATE IT BY CHANGING ITS FRONTIERS. THE LEBANESE MUST FIGHT AGAINST THESE TENDENCIES.

9. THE SENATOR THEN ASKED THE PM TO COMMENT ON THE SYRIAN ROLE IN LEBANON, WHETHER THERE IS A DEADLINE FOR THEIR DEPARTURE, OR ANY PROGRESS ON STRENGTHENING THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT SO THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON (GOL) COULD ASK THE SYRIANS TO LEAVE.

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10. THE PM SAID THAT THERE HAD ORIGINALLY BEEN VALID REASONS FOR THE SYRIANS TO COME INTO LEBANON. THE ALL-SYRIAN ARAB DETERRENT FORCE (ADF) HAD BEEN ACCEPTED BY THE ARAB LEAGUE AND LEBANON NEEDED IT. NOW, HOWEVER, THE SYRIANS MAY HAVE OTHER AMBITIONS AND INTERESTS, WHICH MOTIVATE THEIR REMAINING IN LEBANON. WHAT THE LEBANESE AND OTHERS MUST DO IS TO REMOVE THE PRETEXTS WHICH SYRIA USES TO JUSTIFY THE CONTINUED PRESENCE OF ITS TROOPS IN LEBANON. THESE PRETEXTS HAVE TO DO WITH THE PALESTINIANS, THE INTERNAL SECURITY OF LEBANON, THE UNITY OF THE COUNTRY, AND PEACE BETWEEN THE VARIOUS LEBANESE FACTIONS. WHEN THE PROBLEMS SURROUNDING THESE SUBJECTS ARE SOLVED, THERE WILL BE NO MORE PRETEXT FOR THE SYRIAN PRESENCE.

11. AL-WAZZAN CONTINUED THAT IN SPITE OF THE PRESENT SITUATION IN LEBANON, THE GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON HAD SUBMITTED A WORKING PAPER TO THE ARAB FOLLOW-UP COMMITTEE (AFC) SETTING FORTH A TIMETABLE FOR SYRIAN WITHDRAWAL, WHICH WAS TO FOLLOW THE ACQUISITION BY THE LEBANESE ARMED FORCES (LAF) OF THE MEANS AND ABILITY TO REPLACE THE ADF. BUT UNFORTUNATELY POLITICAL MANEUVERINGS HAD PREVENTED THE IMPLEMENTATION OR EVEN SERIOUS CONSIDERATION OF THIS PLAN. THE GOL WOULD JUST HAVE TO CONTINUE CHIPPING AWAY AT THE

SYRIAN PRETEXTS FOR STAYING. UNFORTUNATELY THE LONGER THE PRESENT SITUATION LASTED THE MORE DIFFICULT IT WOULD BE TO DISLODGE THE SYRIANS WHO WERE DIGGING IN.

12. SENATOR PERCY THEN ASKED WHAT THE U.S. COULD DO IN

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THIS SITUATION AND WHETHER U.S. CONTACT WITH THE PLO WOULD BE DESIRABLE.

13. AL-WAZZAN REPLIED THAT DIRECT USG-PLO CONTACT WOULD SHORTEN THE ROAD TO PEACE IN THE REGION AND WOULD DISCOMFIT THOSE PARTIES, SUCH AS THE USSR, WHICH THRIVE ON THE PRESENT INSTABILITY OF THE AREA AND DEPEND UPON IT TO ADVANCE THEIR INTERESTS. USG CONTACT WITH THE PLO WOULD ALSO LESSEN THE PRESSURE BEING EXERTED ON ARAB GOVERNMENTS TO TAKE ACTION AGAINST THE SUPPORTERS OF ISRAEL, PRIMARILY THE U.S. THE WHOLE KEY TO THE SITUATION IS THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN QUESTION WHICH IS FORCING ARAB GOVERNMENTS TO DEVOTE SO MUCH OF THEIR RESOURCES TO ARMAMENT INSTEAD OF DEVELOPMENT AND THE AVOIDANCE OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS. SOMETHING MUST BE DONE SOON.

14. SENATOR PERCY'S LAST QUESTION WAS WHETHER THE PM HAD RECENTLY DETECTED ANY GREATER DESIRE AMONG LEBANESE FOR NATIONAL RECONCILIATION. THE PM REPLIED THAT HE DEFINITELY HAD, THAT BOTH CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS WANTED TO RECONCILE THEIR DIFFERENCES AND JOIN TOGETHER IN ALLEGIANCE TO THE STATE, AND THAT HIS COLLABORATION WITH PRESIDENT SARKIS WAS A VISIBLE SYMBOL OF THIS. THERE IS A GREATER OPPORTUNITY AT THIS TIME TO REUNITE LEBANON. UNFORTUNATELY THE LEBANESE SITUATION IS LINKED TO THE REGIONAL SITUATION, PARTICULARLY THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM, AND ON THAT SUBJECT, TIME IS RUNNING OUT.

15. THIS MESSAGE HAS NOT BEEN SEEN BY SENATOR PERCY OR HIS STAFF.
DILLON

END OF MESSAGE

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